"Look out kid! You're gonna get it, butt butter beaters six-time woo woos hang around the cheaters girl by the whipper-willow looking for a new pool!"

Keep my damned mouth shut. I'll show Virgil keeping my damned mouth shut.

I was jiving and singing along full voice with the live band as they did a rip-em-up cover of *Subterranean Homesick Blues*. I was the one getting the lyrics all wrong, much to the displeasure of anyone standing close to me; including Virgil and Brian who grabbed me by the arms and dragged me from the stage that had been set up in the middle of Massachusetts Street. They had to clear a path through a throng of college students and Hollyweird people who'd come to party.

"Wooo!" I yanked one arm free and pumped a fist in the air. "Wooooo!"

"Go sober up!" Somebody from the crowd yelled at me.

"That's what you know!" I yelled back. "I don't drink!"

"So you're just naturally an asshole?" came the reply.

Brian and Virgil finally got me away from the band, off the street, and against the wall of one of the shops. "You having a good time?" Virgil asked. "Having fun?"

"I'm having a blast!" The band finished Dylan and started Morrison. "Oh! *Wild Night*!" I started for the stage. "I love this song!"

Virgil shoulder-checked me back to the wall.

"You're not going to make this easy on me, are you?"

"What?"

"I can't get you laid tonight if you keep acting like a fucking spaz."

"Now you're catching on," Brian told him.

"Is that right?" Virgil got in my face. "Are you deliberately trying to sabotage me here?"

"Come on, guys. It's a nice night, great band…. I'm just having a little fun."

"You're embarrassing us is what you're doing."

"Leave him alone," Brian pulled Virgil away.

Virgil sighed. "Fine," he said. "But if you keep acting like that, you're on your own. Don't even try to talk to me, because I won't know you. Understand?"

"Whatever," I said, smoothing out the front of my shirt.

We went back to the street where the party was in full swing. Young people carrying plastic cups of yellow beer grooved to the joyful tunes being belted out by the band. Virgil bird-dogged the girls – I mean he literally looked like a dog; wide, alert eyes darting hither and yon, haunches raised, ready to rush the bushes. Brian stood stone still, arms across his chest, scowling.

A devotee of rock and roll, I took advantage of the downtime to study the musicians. They were a tight three-piece set that went by the highly original name *Steve, Bob & Rich.* They had lots of fluffy hair, wore animal print T-shirts with the sleeves cut off and tight-tight jeans, and played with enough energy for five bands. The guitarist (Steve?) sang with more enthusiasm than tone, never quite reaching that gritty rocker growl but having a great time trying. The drummer (Bob?) was whippet thin, had a whopper of a nose, intense black eyes, and sat behind his kit pounding like a madman, hooting out backup vocals and pointing his sticks at people in the audience. Only the bassist (Rich?) played it cool, thumping out riffs with his mouth set in a serious line.

They finished *Wild Night* and the drummer got up and came around to the front of the stage where he stood behind a microphone and a single snare/cymbal setup. The crowd roared. He clicked his sticks in the air and counted off *One! Two! Three!* and the band launched into a rock-modified version of *Elephant Walk*.

"I wanna big fat blonde!" The drummer sang – or more appropriately – screeched while pounding the snare, the shocking puff of black hair on his head flapping in time like a rooster's crest. *"To hold my hand! To keep this skinny boy from blowing away in the wind!"*

Judging by the audience reaction, this was the band's barn burner – a song called *Big Fat Blonde*. People started dancing; drinks in the air, and most of them knew the lyrics to sing along. The refrain contained a hog-call – *Sooie!* – and just about everybody joined in.

It was kind of awkward because we happened to be standing close to a couple of large-boned, straw haired girls. I tried smiling at them, but they turned away. After the second *Sooie!*, they quit the street and headed for a bar.

Rock and Roll ain't always pretty.

After the song ended, the band left the stage to thunderous applause, promising they'd be back for another set. Now softer music spilled out of the restaurants and bars lining Mass Street and people took to these establishments to get off their feet and refuel. Virgil had his nose open for a group of unescorted babes and, at his insistence; we followed them into a place called *Downstream*.

Inside was smoky and dark; low ceiling, long bar, Meatloaf bemoaning *Two Out Of Three* on the juke. The babes had grabbed a booth and were rummaging through their purses, pulling out make-up and combs. There were four of them; one brunette, three blondes. All fairly attractive in their own right, although one of the blondes was absolutely stunning with Farah Fawcett hair and a stylish wardrobe – blouse and skirt – that accentuated the curves of her luscious body. When she laughed, she laughed loud and heartily, turning heads up and down the bar.

As a counterpoint to this blonde, the brunette wore thick glasses, had limp, lifeless hair, and dressed like she'd just got out of night class: plain white shirt and blue jeans. I didn't notice her laughing at all, but she had an attractive face and was tall and curvy. The other two blondes were not as good looking as the brunette, but they made up for it with towering teased-out hair, exaggerated make-up, and loud flirty mouths.

"I call Farah," Virgil said, signaling for the bartender. "You all can split up the other three as you see fit."

He ordered four beers, and we helped him carry them to the booth.

"Ladies," he greeted them with a smile, distributing the beers. "We thought you looked thirsty."

The girls giggled and chattered amongst themselves, and then the Beauty turned to Virgil and said, "Thank you, very much. What's your name?"

"I'm Virgil," he took her hand in his and held it. "And these are my friends Brian and Shane." I smiled and nodded. Brian just nodded.

“My name is Roxy, and these are my friends – Tina, Stephanie, and Berry. We would invite you to sit but –” she tilted her head and made sad eyes. “No room.”

“We wouldn’t want to impose,” Virgil bowed slightly at the waist. “But if later, we see you on the street, perhaps a dance or two?”

This started another bout of giggles and chatter. Roxy composed herself long enough to say, “It would be a pleasure, Mr. Virgil.”

We backed away from the booth, smiling.

“And that, my friends,” Virgil said as he turned around. “Is how it is done.”

An hour and a half later, we were crammed into Tina’s petite dorm room trying to ignore Roxy and Virgil who were damn near having sex on the twin bed while the rest of us cleared our throats and coughed – looking at the posters of The Police and Robert Plant on the walls.

“Open a window?” I suggested.

The brunette – Berry– obliged, nudging the bed hard as she passed. Virgil and Roxy came up for air. “Oh,” Virgil said. “You’re still here.”

Roxy laughed and draped her arms around his neck. “Taking notes?” she asked.

Tina and Stephanie laughed at that, but then they were drunk. Virgil and Roxy were drunk too. Only Brian and I were sober. Berry– it was hard to tell. She’d had a cup in her hand the entire evening, but I didn’t recall seeing her drink from it, nor did I recall her leaving to get more.

Stephanie moved closer to Brian, almost sitting on his lap. “Are you?” she asked him. “Taking notes?”

Brian sat there with no expression on his face.

Tina had a bag of marijuana but no papers. She’d tried to get a consensus to go to the convenience store, but nobody else seemed interested. So, she was attempting to roll a joint with college-lined, three-hole punch.

For my part, I had tried to engage Berry in conversation – *what's your major, where are you from?* She'd rolled her eyes and said, "Lame."

Fuck her, then. I decided. *I've got ten times better waiting for me at home anyway.*

And I resigned myself to seeing this dreadful evening through to the end.

Berry stood at the open window. A breeze fluttered her hair.

"I'm going outside," she announced. It only took three strides from her long legs and she was at the door. "Coming?" she asked me.

I suppressed the impulse to ask *why?* and then got to my feet. She was probably trying to clear the room so her friend could get laid and then everybody could get on with their lives. Brian, too, started to leave but Stephanie pulled him back down. She whispered something in his ear that got her laughing, but just deepened the furrows in his brow.

Tina was asking for a lighter when I closed the door behind me.

Berry strode ahead of me, down the hall, into the stairwell, then out of the building. We exited to the courtyard of a quadrangle, old trees, some benches, and badminton net. Berry swung herself onto the low branch of a tree and sat there, legs dangling.

Tree climber, eh? I smirked. *I've climbed a tree or two in my day.*

Next thing you know, I was clinging to a very thin branch at the very very top of a very very very tall tree. "You should feel the breeze up here," I said. "Nice."

"You're kind of an idiot," Berry said. "Aren't you."

"I've been called worse," I started down; settling on a branch about level with hers so we could talk. "By better."

A flicker of anger crossed her face. She said, "Huh."

"So, what are you doing here?" I asked out of sheer boredom. "Are you a student? A local? A scarecrow brought to life to terrorize the town?"

She thought about this for a moment then said, “I’ve suffered through all sorts of terrible pick-up lines, but I haven’t seen anything as bad as you since junior high. Do you really think you’re going to get in my pants by insulting me?”

“You insulted me first,” I reminded her. “And I have a girlfriend.” A little white lie. Or was it? Anyway, “So I don’t want to get in your pants at all.”

“Really?”

“Hard to believe, I know.”

She jumped off her perch and came to my tree. She grabbed my ankle.

“So, if I were to pull you off this tree, throw myself on top of you, and start kissing you…. You would stop me?”

“You wouldn’t –” before I could finish, she yanked me down. I fell into her arms. She spun me to the ground and pinned me beneath her.

Her face inches from mine; I could see her dark brown eyes behind those thick glasses. They looked hard and determined.

She pressed her lips to mine. I tried to move my head, but she wouldn’t allow it. Her hands tugged my shirt up, then hers. She pushed her bra away and smooshed her breasts against my chest. Her tongue parted my lips, ran over my teeth until I opened my jaw, and then entered my mouth.

She stopped kissing me and asked, “Your girlfriend. What’s her name?”

I stammered, unable to remember *her* name.

“Thought so.” She started again, tugging my lower lip with her teeth, kissing my jawline. Her hands flew to the buttons on my jeans. She worked them with nimble fingers. She moved her hand under the elastic of my FTLs and grabbed the shaft.

She squeezed hard. A tear leaked from the corner of my eye.

She kissed the tear away, moved her lips to my ear and asked, “Ever been raped?”

She sucked my ear into her wet mouth.

“I have.” She whispered. The words entered my head loud as a scream.

Suddenly she rolled off and turned away while she fixed her bra and shirt.

I did the best I could putting myself together with hands shaking like the paint-mixer at Ace hardware. By the time I finished, she was back on her branch, legs dangling, ankles crossed.

“Still want to know what my major is?”

I stumbled away as fast as possible.

“Finished so soon?” Brian said with a hard edge to his voice.

“Wh… what?” I’d left Berryin the courtyard and zombie-legged it around the building to the front entrance where I was surprised to find Brian sitting on the stoop. He looked pissed.

“I saw you and that other girl going at it around back.”

I sat next to him and took a breath.

“I expect that type of shit from Virgil, but Shane? I know your mother raised you better. Going at it in the yard like dogs. Classy.”

“Brian, dude….” I pushed the heels of my hands into my eyes and shook my head. “It wasn’t… like that.”

“Uh-huh.”

“She was… it…. I wasn’t….” I had no words for it. I bleated a short but shrill yell of frustration, and then said, “I mean – I got fucked, but not like you think.”

“Give it a rest, Shane,” Brian snapped. “Really not in the mood for your shit tonight, man.”

Brian turned away. I could see the tension in his jaw. He stood up and walked away from the dormitory, down an unlit trail leading to the basketball courts.

Crickets chirped. Pale clouds drifted across the sickle moon. I waited until the shock wore off then followed my friend.

He was standing next to one of the basketball poles when I found him. He reached up and tried to grab the net; the tips of his fingers missed by half a foot.

I stood by his side.

“Julia’s pregnant,” he said.

“Jesus, Brian.”

He spun away, pretending to dribble a basketball. Took it to the arch, hunkered down, drove the lane, hit his spot, popped back and released. The imaginary ball dropped clean through the net.

“Jesus, Brian,” I repeated.

He posted up. Pivoted right, left, right, left under the raised arm of a nonexistent defender and took the ball to the hole, touching rim on the jump.

“Jesus *Christ*, Brian.”

He stood in front of me now, holding a fake toy. After a while, his hands sagged and the ball that was never there disappeared.

“I know,” he said.